Cultural Roots and Culinary Practices
A Sociological Study of Oraon Tribes in Jharkhand

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INTRODUCTION:-

Douglas (1972) in her essay *"Deciphering a Meal"* stated that “Food is not just a substance we consume, but a cultural artefact loaded with symbolic meanings, representing and reinforcing social norms, values, and power structures.”The Oraon tribe which is one of the tribal groups in Jharkhand has a sumptuous cultural heritage deeply rooted in their traditional food practices. The advent of modernization led to socio-economic changes which also brought shift in the food pattern resulting in cultural erosion, loss of traditional knowledge attached to it, and changes in dietary practices. Tribal communities traditionally had high diverse diets based on whatever is locally available in their surrounding environment. They gathered wild fruits, vegetables, roots, tubers, hunted, fished and cultivated a variety of crops suited to their regions but in modern times they are shifting to simplified diets with greater reliance on a few staple foods, often rice, usually obtained from government food programs or markets. Tribal food systems aren’t just about sustenance but are deeply interconnected with practices of hunting, gathering, cultivation and food preparation. When these patterns are disturbed, knowledge transmission related to it is broken. Understanding the food habits and culinary traditions of the Oraon tribe is essential for preserving their cultural heritage. Globalization has seriously impacted various aspects of human societies, including food systems and culinary traditions. Tribal communities such as the Oraon tribe are witnessing changes in their traditional food practices due to the modernization as well as commercialization of their food. It is complex as it holds both potential benefits and challenges for the tribal community. It’s crucial to ensure fair and equitable practices that prioritize community control, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability throughout the process.

STATEOFTHEART:-

This topic involves the understanding of the interplay between food, identity and culture of Oraon tribe in Jharkhand.ExistingliteraturehaveexploredtheOraontribeinfragmentslike social structures, ecological knowledge, cultural rituals, food systems and nutrition, sustainability, modernization of Oraon tribe but there is only limited research which focuses particularly on Oraon tribe's culinary practices and its adaptations to modernisation. This research aims to fill that gap, documenting the rich culinary traditions

and it socio cultural transformation.

RELATEDREFERENCES:-

‘Traditionalfood’and‘tribalfood’areoftenconfusedandusedinterchangeablyashasbeen pointed out by Kennedy(2021) in her work ‘Traditional and tribal fruits and vegetables for food system transformation’. Traditional food is a generic term that can be applied to any family, community, culture, nation, or region e.g., family’s traditional food, state’s traditional food, etc. Theterm“tribalfood”referstoaspeciesorvarietythatisnativetoor occursnaturallyinaparticulargeographicalplace, fore.g., Futkal(Ficusgeniculata)is found particularly in the Chotanagpur region and is consumed mostly by the Oraon tribe.

Food not only holds an important place in terms of biological consumption but also describesthe relationship thattribalpeoplehavewithnature;the landthattheyconsider as theirprovideristhesourceofalltheresourcesthattheyneed.Allthepractices areinstilled in the knowledge and worldview of tribal people. Turner(2016) in her article ‘Roots of Reflection’ highlights the deep connection between tribal communities and land emphasizingtheimportanceofspiritualbeliefandpracticeintheirharvestingactivities.The article explores how tribal people’ understanding of a plant goes beyond its physical and material properties, incorporating a spiritual dimension that informs about the interaction of tribal people with natural world. The spiritual aspects of life are deeply intertwined withfoodanditspreparation,includingceremonies.Fore.g.,thereisaspecificceremonyof tribal people residing in north-western part of North America called the First Foods ceremony that revolves around the harvesting and consumption of shoots of the Thimbleberry plant, a relative of Raspberry. These shoots are traditionally eaten in spring, but they are always accompanied by a special ceremony before consumption.

Vijayan(2022)inhispaper‘TribalKnowledgeonFoodSystemTransformation’arguesthat the tribal food system ensures ecological and socio-economic sustainability but remains marginalizedinscienceandpolicy.Hegivessevenentrypointsforengagingtribalfood

systems based on the learnings anddiscussions at the2021UNFoodSystem Summit.The tribal knowledge of the food system is orally passed over generations and needs proper comprehensive documentation of their importance for livelihood and environmental sustainability. Preservation and revitalization of this tribal knowledge requires policy interventions as its complex pattern is often misunderstood. One crucial argument he mentioned is that rather than highlighting the value of tribal knowledge for tribal communities, academic research often only focuses on the usefulness of tribal knowledge for the benefit of the external world which leads to inequalities. The food system is intertwined with the wider political struggle for the self- determination of tribal people.

Tribals have been consuming local food for years, but with their ancestral knowledge and experience over generations, they have developed the medicinal values of their food. The food that theyeatnotonlyhelpsinnourishmentbutalsokeepsthemhealthyandfitforlabourandhardwork throughout the day. Kunhlein(1996) in his article 'Micro Nutrient Nutrition and Traditional Food System of tribal Peoples'argues that traditional knowledge of tribal people about the diversity of world food resources must be preserved and combined with thebasicscientificdatatobuildfoodstrategiesforhealthpromotionactivities.Tribalpeople are greatly malnutritioned but also have rich food species scientifically neglected. A shift away from their lifestyle and food system is likely to push them to chronic diseases and malnourished. In such a scenario understanding the micro- nutrient content of tribal food species can prove to be a significant turning point. He has also discussed about the background work needed and steps to be carried out in the assessment process before implementing health programs. Hehassuggestedthatwhileformulating health plans for tribalcommunities,tribal people should be treated as partners, policy should be inclusive oftheirlocalculture,localissues,locallanguage,andlocalcapacitybuildingforsuccessful implementation.

The study by Mittal and Srivastava(2006) provides a comprehensive look into the diet, nutritional status and food-related traditions of the Oraon tribes residing in the New Mal, WestBengal. Itdelvesintothevariousaspectsof theirdietary habits,includingthetype of foods they consume, their nutritional composition and the frequency of consumption. In termsofdiet,thestaplefoodsoftheOraonpeople,whichincludesgrainssuchasriceand

millets,aswellaslocallyavailablefruits,vegetablesandanimalproductslikemeat,fishand dairy were examined. Researchersalsoexploredspecificdietarypreferencesorrestrictions withinthecommunity.Thestudyalsoassessed the nutritional status of the Oraon population, considering factors such as micronutrient intake, prevalence of malnutrition and overall dietaryadequacywhichhasbeendoneby analysing thenutritionalcontentoftheirdietand comparingittorecommendeddietaryguidelinestoidentify any deficiencies and excesses. Furthermore, Mittal and Srivastava have investigated the cultural and traditional significance of food among Oraon tribes. This involves exploring rituals, ceremonies and festivalsassociatedwithaswellastraditionalcookingmethods,culinarypractices andfood preservation techniques unique to the community. Understanding these aspects provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural context of food consumption among the Oraonpeople.

Tribalfoodscarrythepotentialtocombatmalnutritionandcontributetotheeconomicwell-beingoftribalcommunitiesstrategicallyusingtheirnutritionalbenefitstomaximizemarket opportunities. The study by Downs(2020) focusses on finger millet and Koinaar leaves, collected by the SauriaPaharia tribe in Jharkhand. Through value chain analysis, she identifiesthekeypointswhereinterventionscouldenhancetheproductionandconsumption of these nutrient-rich foods. For finger millet, suggestions include improving storage techniques,properprocessinginfrastructuretoreducepostharvestlossesandenhancesafety of the millets. For Koinaar leaves, improving drying techniques for year-round availability and providing market access support are recommended.

The article titled 'Revisiting indigenous farming knowledge of Jharkhand for conservation of natural resources and combating climate change'by Dey and Sarkar(2001) explores the importanceoftribalfarmingpracticesinJharkhandforthepreservationofnaturalresources and in combating climate change. The researcher emphasized on the significance of traditionalknowledgesystemsheldby tribal communities in Jharkhand, which have been developed and refined over generations. These practices are rooted in sustainable agriculturaltechniquesthatpromotetheconservationofnaturalresources,suchaswaterand soil fertility.Researchers also highlighted the resilience of these tribal farming methods in the face of climate change.

Relationship between food and society is dynamic and multifaceted. Qamra, Roy, Mishra(2006) provideathoroughexaminationofthefoodconsumptionpatternsoftheBhil tribe,offeringavaluableinsightsintotheintersectionofculture,societyandnutritionwithin tribal communities.Theexplorationoffoodconsumptionpatternsshedslightonthedietary preferences, staple foods and seasonal variations in diet among the Bhil community. The discussionsonassociated habits delves into the cultural and social factors influencing food practices, including food rituals, customs and the role of food in social gatherings and ceremonies.This holistic approach provides a deeper understanding of how food serves as more than just sustenance but also as a marker of identity and social cohesion within the Bhil tribe. The article also addresses the nutritional implications of the Bhil tribe's food consumption patterns highlighting potential challenges related to dietary diversity and nutritional deficiencies. By linking food habits to health outcomes, the researchers have underscoredtheimportanceofpromotingculturallysensitiveinterventionstoimprovefood security and nutrition.

Tribalcommunitiespossessthoroughtraditionalknowledgeaboutbiodiversity,agricultural practicesandecologicalmanagement,whichtheyhaverefinedovergenerations.Thesefood systems are inherently sustainable, relying on diverse crops and animals suited to local conditions and often incorporate practices that enhance soil health, conserve water and maintain ecological balance. Morin(2020) in his article "Tribal Communities and Their Food Systems: A Contribution to the CurrentDebate" argues that integrating tribal knowledge with modern scientific approaches can lead to more resilient and sustainable food systems. However, these communities face significant threats from modernisation, commercialised agriculture and climate change, which can erode their traditionalpractices and knowledge. He calls for greater recognition and protection of tribal rights, land and resources and stresses the importanceofincluding tribal voices inpolicy making process.

PROBLEMSTOBEINVESTIGATED:-

The relevance of research depends upon its alignment with the contemporary issue. Tribal foodisintimatelyconnectedtotheculturalidentityoftribes.Itservesasapowerful

symboloftheirheritage,traditionsandwayoflife.Ifthefoodhabitsaredisturbeditwillalso affectthecommunityculturally,sociallyandeconomically.Itcanbeunderstoodasfollows:-

Culturally

- Loss of cultural identity: Culinary practices often serve as cultural distinctiveness. Losingthesepracticescanleadtolossofuniquenessoftribesandconnectiontotheir ancestral roots, homogenising them with dominant cultures. Also culturally marginalizing the community.
- Lossoforaltraditionsandlanguage:Eachtribehasitsownlanguage.Oraonusetheir own language which they call 'Kurukh'. They have specific terms, idioms, songs, storiesrelatedtofoodpracticesandrituals.Whenculinarypracticesarelost,related linguistic expressions are also lost with it.
- Disruption in inter-generation knowledge: Oraon community likeothertribeshave oral traditions which includes knowledge which is passed down generation to generation. When the cycle of transmission of traditional knowledge in form of culinarypracticesisprevented,itcreatesagap.Thesegapsarefilledbymodernfood practices which in turn distances younger generation from their cultural roots.
- Weakening of cultural rituals and traditions: Many festivals of Oraon tribe are centred around food.Therearespecific food related rituals and symbolic meanings attachedtoit.Whenfoodhabitsareaffected,itleadstodilutionofrituals,traditions andfestivals.Foodisarepositoryofcollectivememory.Whenthefoodpracticesare lost, the community struggles to view itself in broader landscape.

Socially

- Alteration in social structures: Oraons have defined roles within the family and community, shift in food habits can alter roles within the family and community which can degrade the social structure of the community.
- Weakening of communal bonds: Oraon traditions have culinary practices which involvescommunity.Theyhavecommunalfeastsandritualswhichifimpacted

weakens the community bonds.The community loses the sense of solidarity andsocial participation.

- Selfsufficiencyandsustainability:Oraontribeisanagriculturaltribe.Theyhavebeen practicingfarmingforalongtimeandwereself-sufficientuntilnowbutintroduction of modern farming practices has caused a shift in their dietary practices. The community is shifting from sustainability to non-sustainability.

Economically

- Lossoflivelihood:Localfarmerswhodependontraditionalsystemswillbeaffected ifthe demand for traditional food declines.Traditional crops are disappearing with monoculturefarming.Localeconomywhichdependsontraditionalfoodproduction and preparation lose income.
- Dependency on market: Small scale producers may face exploitation due to unfair prices in the market. They cannot even bargain due to control of middlemen. Economic hardships force tribal community to abandon their food practices and prioritize survival over cultural preservation.
- Commercialization of food: Commercialization of food causes economic disparity. Degradation of forest is reducing the availability of forest produce. Market based foods especially organic foods are expensive hence people who cannot afford have stick to cheaper options available costing them health. Sometimes community also may commercialize their traditional food for profit often compromising with authenticity.

OBJECTIVESOFTHEINVESTIGATIONANDMOTIVATION:-

Thisresearchaimstoachievethefollowingoutcomes:

- UnderstandingtherelationshipbetweenculinarypracticeandOraontribe'sidentity

- Highlight the symbolic significance of culinary practices in social, economic andspiritual life
- Studytheimpactcausedonculinarypracticesbymodernisationandwaystopreserve it.
- DocumentationofCulinarypracticesoftheOraontribe

RESEARCHQUESTIONS

- Whatarethekeytraditionalculinarypracticesamong Oraoncommunityandhoware they linked to their cultural identity?
- Howdoculinarypracticesreflecttheirrelationshipwith environment?
- Howistheknowledgeof culinarypracticespassed downthroughgenerations?
- Whatisthegenderdynamicsinfoodproduction,preparationandconsumption?
- Infaceofmodernisation andcommercialisation,howcommunityisadaptingtothe changes in culinary traditions?

RESEARCHDESIGNANDMETHODOLOGY

This research will be a descriptive study which will use qualitative data to study the relationshipbetweenculturalrootsandculinarypractices.Purposivesamplingshallbeused for collection of data. Key informants will be elders holding culinary knowledge , knowledge holders, community leaders and older members of the community irrespective ofgender.Localcontactswillbeusedtoidentifypotentialparticipantsfollowedbysnowball sampling technique to connect to other key informants.For this research, Manjhatoli and Kudo Chattarpur in Raidih block, Gumla district of Jharkhand is selected as areas of fieldwork.

Data will be collected through primary and secondary sources. Under primary sources researcherwillbeaparticipantobservantalongwithinterviewingkeyinformantsforwhich semi structured interview schedule will be prepared. Interviewee will be selected through purposivesampling.Focussedgroupdiscussionwillalsobeconductedtogaininsights.The data will be recorded in form of photographs and audio or visual recording.

Undersecondarydatavariouspublishedgovernmentsreports,ethnographicstudiesonOraontribe, anthropological works on tribes, research papers and journals, thesis will beused for deeper understanding.

Data collected through interviews(culinary experts, knowledge holders within the community),focussedgroupdiscussion,recordingswillbereviewedandreadmultipletimes to understand the context clearly.After which data will be organised thematically. Patterns willbeidentifiedtoestablishrelationshipbetweendatacollected.Meaningsofpatternsand themes will be interpreted to answer the research questions. Findings will be validated through triangulation, peer review and member checking to conform the accuracy of the data. At last the findings will be reported in a structured and concise manner.

SIGNIFICANCEOFTHE STUDY

This topic will investigate sociological significance of culinary practices and its role in shapingthecommunity.Itstrivestorecognizeandcelebratethesumptuousculinaryheritage of the Oraon community as well as documenting and preserving it. It will deepen our understanding of the Oraontribe's worldviewthrough role of food.

ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT DAY PROBLEM AND NEED TO THE SOCIETY

The culinary habits of the tribals including Oraon tribes are largely changing due to modernisation and urbanization. People are migrating out of the villages in search for jobs which is directly impacting their traditional food habits. Tribals settled in urban areas are adoptingnon-tribalfoodhabitsasmostoftheingredientsandfoodsarenotavailableinthe citiesorurbanareas.Alsotheyareusingurbanways,condimentsandspicesavailableinthe markets which alter the authentic taste of tribal foods. Hence they are compelled to adopt urbanlifestyleandadoptnewfoodhabitssuitablefortheirnearbysurroundings.Thischange

in the food habits is altering theirsocial structure within the community. It is breaking the ties with cultural roots and is imposing cultural change. By focussing on the unexplored culinary practices of the Oraon tribe, this research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge about tribal food studies and promote cultural appreciation and understanding.

FUTUREWORK

Researchfindingscaninformpolicymakers,tribalcommunities,andrelevantorganizations in developing culturally sensitive strategies to preserve and promote traditional food practices in the face of modernization. Tribal food practices have been influenced due to many reasons. Hence this researchexplorationleavesscopeforfutureworkassamplesize maynotrepresenttheentireOraon population and will open many doorways which can be an extension to this research.

CHAPTERISATION

Thissynopsisisdividedtentativelyintofollowingchapters:- Chapter1:Introdution

- HistoricaloriginandmigrationpatternoftheOraons
- Geographicalandecologicalcontextoftheir habitat
- RelevanceofstudyingOraontribe

Chapter2:Oraoncommunityandtheirseasonaldietary practices

- Differentseasonsinanagriculturalcycle,croppatternsandharvestingmethods
- Foodhabitsandseasonalresourceavailability
- Traditionalpracticesformanagingresourcesacrossseasons

- Traditionalfood production,preparationandpreservation method

Chapter3:Foodrituals,taboosandcultural symbolism

- Specificfoodsuniqueto Oraon community
- Foodassymbolofsocialstatus,power,prosperity,fertility,health,
- Foodritualinfestivals,communalfeasts,religiousceremonies
- Sacredfoodandtheirspiritualsignificance,perceptionofpureandimpure
- Foodtaboosbasedonage,socialstatus,kinship,gender

Chapter4:Culinary Practices in Rites de passage

- ExplanationofRitesdepassage(Birth,Initiation,MarriageandDeath)
- SignificanceoflifetransitionintheOraonworldview
- Rolefoodin theselifetransitions

Chapter5:Socialstructuresandfooddistribution

- DescriptionoftheOraontribe'ssocialhierarchyandorganization
- Mechanism offooddistributionwithinthefamilyand community
- Genderrolesandtheirinfluenceonfoodproductionand distribution

- Caste and class divisions within the community and their impact on food access

Chapter6:GlobalisationandModernization

- Changesintraditionalfoodritualsandtaboosduetomodernization
- ImpactofGlobalisation,Urbanisationonculinary practices
- Lossofculturalsymbolisminfood practices
- Commercialisationoffood

Chapter7:Conclusion

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